WHY JOIN THE PARTY

By Professor Vida D. Scudder

Hundreds of Socialists all over the country ask themselves this question. Real Socialists, not the fancy type seen in drawing rooms but the ordinary, tough kind who keep growing like hardy plants, have already moved far beyond the basic reform plans that many progressives agree on. These are people who would never be satisfied with slowly creating a little bit of social well-being and economic fairness. Their beliefs reach as far as getting rid of the wage system, making all the wealth that helps society belong to everyone, and creating a system where workers have true power through a cooperative commonwealth. Times are changing quickly; sometimes it seems that these bold ideas—even though most people still dislike them—are agreed upon by one out of every five, or even one out of every ten people you talk to. Every day, we see a great increase in Socialist belief and passion. Yet, among those who call themselves Socialists, only a small number take what seems like the natural step and join the party that stands for these ideas. Why?

We all know the reasons very well. Many people do not like to focus on the fight between classes. Some think that the idea of class struggle is just an old, useless thought and do not like the strong, angry feeling that comes with it. Others feel strange or uncomfortable when they think about joining the party, and many never even think of joining. Even though socialist books and ideas have reached many people in schools and colleges, the real, active movement stays far away from them. They do not see it as something real or important because, in a very vague way, they are not even aware that it exists.

More than any other modern political movement, Socialism is based on a way of thinking. You must think very hard to accept it. This fact might one day prove its strength, but for now it is also a weakness. It does not take much deep thinking to become a Republican or a Democrat. The Progressive platform is mostly just a clear way of showing that people are angry about the obvious social wrongs we see every day. But to become a Socialist is very different. It takes a long and serious process of thought, a willingness to let go of old traditions that you have always held dear, and a deliberate effort to free your mind. It takes a great amount of mental and moral courage. The process is so powerful and the moment of finally accepting these ideas—whether it happens all at once or slowly over time—seems almost enough on its own. It is so great that once you truly understand it, you escape the trap of social hopelessness and see clearly the path to a better, more just society.

Many people who are not active in political or work struggles have reached this point. They have decided which famous thinker to follow—like Kant, Locke, James, Royce, or Bergson—and in doing so, they have chosen to be Socialists. They have found an intellectual home in these ideas, and for them, that is the end of the matter.

But it should not be the end. Being a Socialist means taking on a different kind of responsibility than just being a follower of ideas like those of Hegel. Although Socialism starts with big ideas about how people relate to one another and about human rights, it really comes to life when we build a specific way of organizing society—and that plan will never work unless we create it. There is a huge struggle between simply believing in these ideas and actually building a cooperative society. And the fight is already on. As English Walling has pointed out, while academic thinkers slowly come to their beliefs, the Socialist movement—full of working people, passion, and political action—has been growing straight out of real life. There is a wide gap between the theorists and the fighters, and that gap needs to be closed. Life is much more than theory, so it is up to the thinkers to cross that gap and join the party.

One cannot decide for other people, and many smart, good men and women might be helping the Socialist cause better by working outside the party than by joining it. It is important to look at the situation honestly. By staying out of the party, a person avoids many misunderstandings; but by joining, they might lose some of their influence. When you stay out, you avoid taking on shared responsibilities for things you might not agree with; when you join, you may have to support decisions you really dislike. For example, if you are outside the party, you can vote as you think is best at that moment. But if you are inside the party, you become part of a group that expects you to stick with its decisions—even though you may have helped make them and might later disagree. In joining the Socialist Party, one sacrifices some personal freedom. By staying out, you can keep a clear, pure perspective, far from the messy battle for freedom, and admire the inspiring ideal from a distance. But if you join, the dust and noise of the struggle can cover your vision, and you might start to wonder if you have lost sight of the goal.

Yes! Staying out is more comfortable. You feel cleaner and freer. But there is one problem: no true god stays far away from the fight. To think that gods are distant was an old mistake. All real gods are part of the struggle, and the struggle shows who they are. If we want to be like gods, we must join the struggle. It is natural for people to want to stay out, but to join in is the noble way.

If you believe that Socialism is true, staying out of the Socialist Party is not the right choice. Every one of us—even Socialists—is an individual, sometimes even a bit like an anarchist. Simply following the Socialist ideas does not make you part of the movement. Those ideas are worthless unless they are put into practice and change life. When you join the party, the things you might keep by staying out—such as personal freedom, status, or influence—lose their importance compared to the chance to share your beliefs and the honor of joining the great fight for what you believe in.

Many true Socialists stay out of the party because they do not like how we use the idea of class struggle. We always say that the party does not create class struggle by just noticing it, and if God allowed this struggle to happen in history, He likely wants us to use it. But if you do not like the harsh side of the struggle, you have the power to

soften it and change its nature simply by joining the workers' movement. If enough people join, then being a worker will be seen as normal, even though it always must remain that way. Similarly, if some think that the party feels too focused on money or too chaotic, they will find that by joining, they can help change those ideas quickly. And if people stay out only because they do not know enough or are stuck in narrow ways of thinking, then for their own good they need to leave the books and join real life.

How worthwhile it will be if the International Socialist Society can persuade hundreds and thousands of honest Socialists to see things this way!

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The Intercollegiate Socialist Society is commencing its season 1913-1914 with splendid Prospects. During the last college year the number of undergraduate chapters increased from 49 to 64 and graduate Chapters from 6 to 12; a quarterly magazine, The International Socialist, was established and the beginnings were made in the formation of district executive committees.

One of the most significant features last season was the marked interest in Socialism which was found time to pervade entire college bodies in a number of institutions. This interest registered itself in the invitations extended to Socialists by members of the faculty of the various undergraduate bodies to explain the fundamentals of Socialism before college classes, at a chapel exercises and other gatherings; in the animated discussions of Socialism by students in economic history and other classes; in the extensive reading of Socialist books, periodicals, and in the large attendances at meetings arranged under auspices of the Society.

The Society, this year, is planning to make a special feature of its quarterly magazine, The Intercollegiate Socialist. The first issue will be out in October and will contain articles among others by Prof. Vida D. Scudder, Ernest Poole, Arthur Bullard, C. Hanford Henderson, J. G. Pholps Stokes, John C. Kennedy, William English Walling, Caro Lloyd and Harry W. Laidler. The Book Review department will be a special feature. Copies may be secured at 10c a piece from the headquarters of the Society, 105 W. 40th Street, New York City. Subscription price is 25c a year. Bundles of 20 copies may be purchased for $1.00. All those interested are urged to order their copies at once.

MOUTH-BREATHERS

Luxurius, rampant life, through evolution's strife
Has stamped those "living fast" with errors of their past;
The knotted, hobble teeth, the lame and peg-like teeth,
Teeth striped and yellow-pitted reveal their sins committd.
    Thus ugly teeth bespeak the slovenly and weak;
    with peccant nose-unused, with mouth misshaped-abused,
    Each gust of air, each breath, by way of mouth, claims death;
    Teeth leave them day by day in rhythmical decay!
Before it plays its share, the sweetest, purest air,
When passing through the mouth, becomes impure, uncouth;
Thus "liquid life"- the blood- is poisoned, paled and slow'd
To waste their chest their health, their happiness and wealth!
    The light and restless sleep the horrid dreams that creep
    Through dusky, foggy hours, the dreary mental powers,

The dry and coated tongue, the snoring loud and strong
Enough to wake the dead- these coil their lives with lead!
Blue rings below their eyes, the fearful look, the sighs,
The blushes- oft behind their specs- betray the mind,
And weary, yawning self. The breathing in itself
Is at an ebb so low, that wind's a deadly blow!
With guttural tongue- voice, with moods oppressed,- real joys
Are strange to them! The sneeze, they cough in faintest breeze
And hawk. The aching head, the nose is e'er in dread
Of air. With lips apart- they shame our higher art!

Mark J. Emelin, D.D.S.

WHY JOIN THE PARTY

By Professor Vida D. Scudder
Author of "Socialism and Character"

(From the October-November Number, The Intercollegiate Socialist.)

Hundreds of Socialists all over the country are asking themselves this question. Real Socialists too, not the parlor type, but of the common garden variety,- hardy perennials, if you will. They are people who have gone far ahead of the excellent reform program in which progressives of all schools agree, people who would never be content with the gradual establishment of a reasonable modicum of social well-being and economic "justice"; people whose convictions do not stop short of the abolition of the wage system, the socializing of all socially productive wealth, and uncompromising industrial democracy realized through a co-operative commonwealth. Times move swiftly; sometimes is seems as if these strong formulae, still abhorrent to the majority, held the assent of every fifth person one talked to,- certainly of every tenth. We witness from day to day a surpassing growth of Socialist conviction and emotion. But of avowed Socialists only a small percent take what would seem to be the natural step and join the party committed to the principles the profess. Why?

We all know the reasons well enough. Many people hate to stress the class struggle as an instrument. Others suspect a materialistic castoff thought and dislike the animus of the movement. Others would "feel queer" in the party organization, and to a great many it never occurs to join, because while Socialists literature and Socialist emotion have to a considerable extent percolated into their intellectual and academic world, the fighting force, the practical movement, remains outside their vision and beyond their horizon. They are actually unaware of it as a thing to be taken seriously and with respect, except in the vaguest sort of way, they are ignorant that it exists.

More than any other modern political movement, Socialism is rooted in a philosophical conception. One has to think hard to accept it. This fact may someday prove its strength, meantime it is in some respects a temporary weakness. No particular intellectual travail is necessary to make a man into a Republican, or a Democrat. The Progressive platform is hardly more than an orderly expression of Good-Will angered by our obvious social wrongs. But to become a Socialist is different. This involves a long grave process of thought, an abandonment of traditions instinctively cherished, a deliberate mental emancipation of oneself, and a tremendous act of both intellectual and moral courage. so intense is the process, so dramatic the final acquisition of faith, whether faith come suddenly as a conversion or slowly as a natural climax, that these seem in a way all-sufficient. The thing is so great that one has escaped the blind alley of social hopelessness, and beholds the way to social righteousness clear before one.

Numbers of people whose lives do not involve them in any political or industrial struggle, are precisely at this point. As they have decided whether they will follow Kant or Locke, James or Royce, Bergson or another, so they have made up their minds to be Socialists. they have found their intellectual home, and there is an end of it.

But it should not be the end. To be a Socialist implies a different kind of responsibility from being a disciple of Hegel. For though Socialism be rooted in abstract ideas of human relations and rights, it flowers in a definite conception of social organization, which will never become actual unless we make it so. Between the act of faith and the co-operative commonwealth, lies the big struggle. And the fight is "on." As English Walling so well insists, while the academic theorists have been cautiously coming to their convictions, the Socialist movement, proletarian, passionate, political, has been growing straight out of life. Between the theorists and the fighters, a gap yawns wide. It should be crossed, and life is so much more than theory, that it is the part of the theorists to cross the gap, join the party.

One cannot decide for other people, and many clever and good men and women are conceivably serving the Socialist cause better outside the party than they could within it. It is well to confront the situation honestly. By staying out one avoids a lot of misconception; by coming in oneforfeits a lot of influence. By staying out one keeps clear if corporate responsibility for many things, tangible and intangible of which he may disapprove; by coming in one may meet distressing moments, when he has apparently to endorse what he may really abhor, For instance, if one stays out he can cast his vote in an opportunist fashion, as he may judge best at a particular moment; if he is within, he has become part of an organization demanding fidelity to its decisions, decision to be sure which he has his share in reaching through the party vote, but from which he may in the end dissent. To an appreciable degree, one does in joining the Socialist Party sacrifice his liberty. By staying out one can remain in a pure atmosphere, remote from the agonizing process toward freedom, in a god-like aloofness contemplating an inspiring ideal. If one comes in, the dust of battle hides the vision, and in the turning of the way one questions if the goal be lost.

Yes! Staying out is more comfortable. One feels more clean, more free. There is only one trouble. No real gods ever aloof. To think them so was an old theological blunder. All the real gods are within the struggle, and the very process itself is their expression of themselves. If we want to be god-like, we too must get into that struggle and that process. It is the human instinct to stay out; to get within, is the divine method.

To stay outside the Socialist Party, when one has become convinced that Socialism is true, is an unsocial performance. One does not judge other people. Every last one of us,

Socialists not in the least excepted, is an individualist, and even an anarchist, in spots; and nobody gets socialized through and through by simply adhering to the Socialist creed. But that creed like all others is worthless unless it gets into experience and recreates life, and just in proportion as it does so, liberty, status, influence, irresponsibility toward the wrongs and blunders of others, all cherished assets to be kept by remaining outside the party, fade and lose their value before the spiritual vision, while one thing shines out,- the chance to bear one's kittle witness, the privilege of enlisting in the great army definitely pledged to fight for what one believes in.

Many convinced Socialists stay outside the party because they do not like our avowed use of the class struggle as an instrument. Now as we are always saying the party does not create that struggle by recognizing it, and if the Lord has allowed it to develop as an historic phenomenon, He probably intends us to make some use of it. But if people do not like it, they have the power to soften its asperities and modify its character, by the very simple act of joining the proletarian movement, which if sufficient numbers join, would be a proletarian no longer in any sense to which exception could be taken, through in the true sense it mush always remain such. In the same way, if people think the animus of the party materialistic or anarchistic, (an opinion in which if they join they will find themselves largely mistaken), they can change that animus and introduce new factors and emphases as swiftly as they will. If mere ignorance holds them out, and the all but hopeless provincialism that stifle and intellectual aristocracy is a more deadening negative force than we realize, then they need for their own salvation to escape from the books to life.

How worth while it will be if the I.S.S. can persuade honest Socialists by hundreds and by thousands, to see the matter in this way!